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HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP: A LARGER VIEW

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WE MAY view education for citizenship on the level of higher education, at least here in the United States, with three main questions in mind: (1) Is it designed merely to make of the students well-informed and efficient participators in civic duties, the worth and the obligatory force of which are not questioned? (2) Is it designed to make of the students constructive critics of such duties as well as obedient agents of them? (3) Is it designed to make of at least some of its students civic leaders, rather than only cooperative participators and constructive critics?

These questions probe right toward the heart of the problem; and, sooner or later, they force us to face fundamental issues in higher education in America. For, in accordance with the way in which one answers these three questions, so will the contents and methods of education for citizenship vary. Further, it may well turn out that an affirmative answer to Question (1) and negative answers to Questions (2) and (3) will confront us with two choices. We may admit into the university, methods, courses, and activities which, however useful, are not within the province of the university as traditionally visualized. Or we may modify our conception of the university. Such a twofold choice would confront us, starkly, with the questions: Have we the right thus to change our conception of the university? Granted the right, is it expedient to do so, from the point of view of the university itself, from the point of view of the student, from the point of view of society?

Here we come close to some of the thoughts presented to us by Dr. H. R. Kruyt, of the Netherlands. As he pictured American higher education of the present and especially of the future, he stressed, and accurately, its strongly quantitative impetus.

NOTE: Excerpts from an address delivered at the European Conference of the International Student Service, in De Tempel, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, July 12, 1950.

He quoted Dr. Zook as saying that the goal in American higher education is soon to be that of each two citizens, one would have gone through the process of higher education. But he went on to point out that according to European criteria, this would not mean that of each two individuals thus "processed", one would be a university graduate. He made it very clear that American higher education both includes a great deal which, in Europe, would not be considered university education, and excludes a great deal which, in Europe, would be regarded as essential to a university.

Education for citizenship is a case in point. I can put it best this way: If we push our tendency of "higher education for all" to its extreme, then we are going to have as our students, many individuals incapable of learning more than the first of the three modes of citizenship just mentioned—an informed and efficient participation in ordinary, comparatively uncomplicated, civic activities and duties, as they exist, without attempted criticism, and without attempts at civic leadership—particularly, without attempts at such types of civic leadership as might involve necessary revision or replacement of the existing and conventionally accepted civic patterns. But from at least two points of view this, to many of us in the American university community, would be most regrettable.

Why? Because, in our opinion, it would betray the very democratic ideals and values which it supposedly is advancing. And because, in our opinion, it would betray the very qualitative ideal of the university, which is still a very strong force in American thinking on higher education.

Let me elaborate somewhat on each of these points. As Matthew Arnold, the English cultural critic and educator, pointed out in the nineteenth century, a democracy does not escape the necessity it shares with other modes of social and political life; it must somehow produce, recognize and entrust with proper responsibilities an adequate number of leaders of adequate talent, training and devotion. Otherwise it becomes, in the words of Thomas Carlyle, a rudderless ship headed for the Niagara Falls; and sooner or later it comes to grief. Now it is true that, as Cardinal John Henry Newman once put it, a university does not directly aim to produce geniuses, although now

and again it has harbored geniuses within its walls. Nor does it aim to produce a generation of heroes, for heroes are so often born rather than made. What the university seeks to do, Newman continues, is to achieve a great but ordinary end—to lift the general cultural level of society. And so, it would follow as a major contribution to this end, the university supplies educated men of more than ordinary ability and training in the philosophic and cultural habit of mind and manner, who act as electromagnets, lifting the general cultural level of society.

But the difficulty is that civic education of the first type I have designated—civic education for participation in the established civic processes without criticizing and without leading does not further this university aim. What such education is likely to do is to provide many sensitized social particles without providing the electromagnet which is to act as the organizing, concentrating and creatively shaping agency that gives meaningful form to these charged particles.

For several reasons, this, from the point of view of the democratically oriented society, is very undesirable. Worse, it is dangerous. What it does is to provide a trained and efficient followership without doing its share to provide democratically devoted and educated leadership to help this followership cooperatively articulate and implement its civic ideals and methods.

Such a situation may all too easily, in an avowedly democratic milieu, become the prelude to the servile community or the slave state, which is another way of saying that it may all too easily succumb to totalitarianism.

For, almost by definition, a community, a society cannot afford long to be in a state of poorly directed yet energized and efficient civic activity. Denied the coordinating, integrating and unifying services of democratically devoted and responsible leadership, it will be threatened with one of the following catastrophies. It may disintegrate through the sheer expansive dynamism of the competing and mutually repellent particles which make it up. It may be coerced into order and unity by a non-democratically committed individual or group of individuals. That is, it may achieve order at the price of totalitarianism—a coerced *gleichschaltung* which is just the opposite of that flexible and cooperative community to which we of the democratic tradition aspire.

As believers in the democratic way of life, as educators committed to it, we are exhilarated and inspired by the dazzling new possibilities in higher education opened to us lately. Yet there is an ambivalence in our mood, in our attitude toward this wave of the future and these signs of the times. We are filled with grave concern, with misgivings as to some of the negative implications in all this, both for democratic community and society and for the university as a cultural and civic agency.

We are gravely concerned lest our so-called education for citizenship turn out to be education for life in the servile state under a form of organization like that of the beehive or the ant hill. We are concerned lest it prepare our oncoming generations for life in the sort of state terrifyingly portrayed by Orwell in his "1984."

We keep recommending that, *at every stage in the present movement of expansion in American higher education, we introduce corresponding correctives against the extremes of the movement.* This means that we make these recommendations, too, in connection with education for citizenship—in fact, *especially* in connection with our education for citizenship.

We believe that we must channelize the enthusiasm and harness the dynamism of the present wave of expansion in American higher education. Here is how we look at it. It is comparatively easy to embark on a program of educational expansion which ignores quality and which exalts sheer size and numbers. Likewise, it is comparatively easy to adopt the opposite extreme of attitude and to say, with Professor George Scelles of the Faculty of Law at the University of Paris, as he expressed himself in 1948 at the Utrecht Preparatory Conference of Representatives of Universities:

> Higher education is the axis of the culture of the nation. It does not constitute the whole of its culture, since there is also primary and secondary education. Nor is it identical with science, or with transcendental research, nor again with applied science. It is the culture of an *elite*. . . . The aim of the university is to be the genesis of thought for the *elite*. . . .

What is not so easy is to make these two seemingly antithetic impulses in higher education work at least tractably in harness, gaining the benefits of the distinctive virtues of each impulse, yet

avoiding the distinctive drawbacks of each, and reducing the points of friction between the two. Herein, as I see it, is to be found the troubled crux of the problem of American higher education, generally, and, as a moment's reflection will show, herein lies the troubled crux of the problem of education for effective citizenship in American colleges and universities.

This many of us American educators recognize as our central problem, but also as a challenge with much promise for the good. Both in our curriculum efforts toward education for civic responsibility and in our extracurricular and extramural efforts toward these ends, there are many of us academic soldiers of the line—cooperating closely with our students, not bossing them, but making available to them all our personal resources of ability, experience, and moral, cultural and civic stamina and morale, giving of our time and effort far beyond the call of professional duty as narrowly defined, and certainly far beyond our financial remuneration.

We do it not only because we really love students and believe in them, and believe in what they can do for a humane and democratic future American community, but also because we still regard our university responsibilities not as a job, not even just a profession, but rather as a calling in an almost religious sense of that word.

Finally, because we have a vision of the university, not as a factory mechanically turning out standardized and interchangeable parts in a technicized social machine, but rather (to echo John Henry Newman) as an *alma mater,* knowing its students as a mother knows her children—one by one, as sacredly unique individuals of intrinsic worth and hence commanding individual respect, and assuming as a direct responsibility the social task of sending forth from the university, along with the many informed and efficient participators in the established civic processes, a minority designed for civic leadership.

It seems an irreconcilable contradiction, does it not—this quest for qualitative emphasis in a dominantly quantitative wave of expansion in higher education? Yet, as is true of so many other important aspects of life, which seem mutually contradictory, it can be one of those successful paradoxes that lie at the core of the vital process itself. At any rate, it is this paradox which

many of my American academic colleagues are bent upon realizing in our higher education. We consider this paradox essential, as we try to shape in the United States a *Civitas Academica* that is at once compatible with our humane love of our students with our democratic desire for maximum education —up to the limits of their capacities and determination—for the greatest number. And, on the other hand, with the desire we have as heirs of the great academic and university tradition of the Western World, for the maintenance of an at least adequate qualitative accent in the American university experience.

Yet it seems to me that, in working toward this balanced end, we are exhibiting a mode of cultural adaptation of traditional values to changed personal and social needs. In trying to achieve this democratic paradox of quality within quantity in mediating between the extremes of each of these tendencies, in trying to establish a strenuous and tensional yet harmonious balance between these tendencies, or a dynamic reconciliation of them, are we not being true to that tradition of mediation and harmonizing so rationally and attractively developed especially by those European ethical and Christian humanists of whom Erasmus of Rotterdam is one of the strongest and yet finest exemplars? It was another noted Renaissance personality, Leonardo da Vinci, who is said to have exclaimed in spite of all his gifts: *"Defuit mihi una—symmetria prisca"!* In a word, are we not engaged in a kind of creative traditionism which should ultimately prove of great value to the transnational university community?

Certainly it appears to me that it is this quest for a paradoxic balance and symmetry, rather than the much more spectacular and much more widely publicized—especially among non-American educators—sheer quantitarian wave of expansion in American higher education, that will in the long run, turn out to be the more meaningful aspect of our contemporary developments in American higher education seeking to meet the needs of citizenship.

For myself, viewing the matter without dismay, I think that the effort to achieve a *modus vivendi,* as between our quantitative dynamism and activism and our qualitative direction and control —this, rather than the many gadgets and tricks of pedagogic and administrative "know-how" which we are inventing or

evolving to handle masses of students, this may turn out to be our distinctive contribution to the admittedly difficult problem of higher education for our time and on the international, as well as the national level.

Granted, it may be asking for nothing short of a miracle to bring about this paradoxic reconciliation of quantity with quality. Yet, at least in American education, we have before now known miracles. And why may we not continue to look for such miracles, especially if we observe one proviso, that we add works to our faith?

Had time permitted, I would have mentioned and briefly described some of the aids which, right within our own American academic community, we have found useful in establishing a qualitative factor in our contemporary quantitative development of the American college and university. Now I wish to speak of a most important aid to the realization of this goal, an aid which we hope to find in other than our own sector of the world university community, specifically in the sector of Western Europe. Frankly, we American educators look to European students and university teachers for crucial help in this crucial effort.

American higher education, as so many other essential American social institutions, has its roots in European higher education, both in the morally and culturally rich soil of the humanistic academy and in the specifically intellectually and professionally rich soil of the European university. In the past, American higher education has periodically renewed itself at these Old-World sources. In the present and the near future, we again are turning for similar renewal of spirit, ideal and, especially, standards. As you work out your problem, you can help us members of the American academic community in at least two important ways. (1) By seeking to understand, critically yet sympathetically, what we in the United States are trying to do and how we are trying to do it. (2) By giving us demonstrations, here in your own university reform, of how, while remaining loyal to your qualitative, intellectualist and professional tradition, you may still creatively adapt that tradition to the pressures of increasingly populist educational needs and demands.

That tireless worker for the International Student Service and World Student Relief, Winburn Thomas, now of Bangkok, Siam,

once told me that it has been at the point of most acute psychological, even physiological need that he has been able to enter into a way of life different from his own, to experience it sympathetically, subjectively, as a primary datum of his own consciousness. Similarly, I say that it is at this point of our urgent American academic need for resolving the crux of quantity versus quality that you European colleagues of ours in the transnational university community can best participate in our problem—if you penetrate into it with the magnanimity and the charity as well as the comprehensiveness of view which I have just invoked.

As Dr. Kryt has so graciously and sagaciously put it: "Let us be wise and learn from one another."